

Community Eligibility Option Evaluation

A study by Abt Associates for USDA-FNS

Study Overview

The Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act of 2010 made the Community Eligibility Option (CE Option) available to Local Education Agencies (LEAs) and schools in high poverty areas. Under the CE Option, families are not required to submit applications for free or reduced-price meals and schools must provide free meals to all students. The potential benefits are that in high-poverty schools more students will have access to nutritious meals and LEAs may experience reductions in administrative burden. The CE Option is being phased in starting with three States eligible for participation in SY2011/12 and in four additional participating States in each of the following two school years. The CE Option will be available to all States in the 2014/15 school year. The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) has contracted with Abt Associates to conduct an evaluation of the CE Option. This congressionally mandated study has the following objectives:

- Examining the characteristics of eligible schools that participate in the CE Option and those that choose not to participate
- Examining the incentives and barriers to participation and implementation of the CE Option
- Estimating CE Option impacts on LEAs, schools and children, including impacts on program administration, nutritional quality and foodservice costs and revenues

To accomplish these objectives, the following data collection activities are planned:

STATE INTERVIEWS AND SURVEY

For each participating State, a telephone interview will be conducted (July 2012 and/or May-July 2013) with the State Child Nutrition Director and lists of eligible and participating LEAs and schools will be collected (Winter 2011/12 and July 2012). A brief telephone survey about uses of free and reduced-price meals data will be administered to State Education Agency Directors in all 50 States and DC. (Fall 2012).

LEA WEB SURVEYS

Web surveys focusing on experiences and opinions of the CE Option will be collected from Foodservice Directors at 1400 selected LEAs across the participating States (October-December 2012 or January-March 2013). Another web survey requesting administrative data will be collected from Foodservice Directors at 240 selected LEAs (Winter 2013).

COST INTERVIEWS

Cost interviews will be conducted in-person with Foodservice Directors from 106 selected LEAs (preceded by a brief pre-visit interview and form), Cafeteria Managers from 318 selected schools, and School Administrators from 100 of those schools (Winter/Spring 2013). In addition to the interview, an on-site certification record review will be conducted at each of the 318 schools.

MENU SURVEY

A five day menu survey will be collected by Cafeteria Managers at 156 selected schools (Winter/Spring 2013). This will be preceded by pre-visit interviews and an on-site training session. Study staff will conduct a visit during the menu collection week to observe cafeteria operations. Reporting of meal counts and claims between the schools and LEAs will also be examined.

The final report on the study findings is due to Congress on December 31, 2013.

If any additional information is needed regarding this study, please contact any of the following:

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Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to the Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Research and Analysis, 3101 Park Center Drive, Alexandria, Virginia 22302.